



MONTANA FISH AND WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

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Meeting Date: April 23, 2020

Agenda Item: Amelia Island WMA Farming Lease, Region 7

Action Needed: Final Approval

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 5 minutes

Background: The 191-acre Amelia Island Wildlife Management Area (WMA) was obtained by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) in 1980 using hunting license and Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration funds. The management goal of this property is to conserve existing riparian habitat and create a mosaic of native and cropland habitat for the benefit of white-tailed deer and pheasant, thereby providing recreational opportunity for sportsmen.

The 48 acres of farmed lands proposed for lease were cultivated prior to acquiring the WMA. Under this proposal, the lessee would continue to cultivate and harvest a crop on approximately 75% of the cropland. In return, the lessee would be required to plant and leave standing annual habitat plots in approximately 25% of the cropland for the benefit of wildlife.

Public Involvement Process & Results: FWP released a draft environmental assessment (EA) for public review of the proposed agricultural lease on January 31, 2020, and accepted public comment until February 28, 2020. FWP received one public comment that opposed the proposed management action in favor of idling the cropland areas. FWP issued a Decision Notice on March 11, 2020, in support of the agricultural lease, contingent on commission approval.

Alternatives & Analysis:

Proposed Action: Continue farming lease; wildlife would benefit from wintering habitat and forage on the farmed areas and particularly areas left unharvested for wildlife. The lessee would be responsible for controlling noxious weeds on leased acres.

No Action: Farm lease would not be renewed; resources would be diverted from other FWP programs to control noxious weeds and to manage these acres. FWP may not have the resources to continue the habitat enhancement efforts at the current scale

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends approval to renew this farming lease, providing enhanced wildlife habitat and public recreation opportunities.

Proposed Motion: I move the commission approve the farming lease agreement on Amelia Island WMA as proposed.